

Sūrah 102

Al-Takāthur

(Acquisitiveness)

(Makkan Period)

Title

The opening word *al-takāthur* (acquisitiveness) constitutes this *Sūrah*'s title.

Period of Revelation

According to Abū Ḥayyān and Shawkānī, it is generally regarded as a Makkan *Sūrah*. Imām Suyūṭī also endorses this view. However, the following reports speak of it as a Madīnan *Sūrah*.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes Abū Buraydah's report that it was revealed regarding the two tribes of the Anṣār – namely, Banū Ḥārithah and Banū al-Ḥarth. Both of them boasted of the glory of their ancestors and did the same in graveyards in each other's presence. This occasioned the revelation of this *Sūrah*. However, in light of the viewpoints of Companions and Successors about the circumstantial setting of a *Sūrah*, this does not conclusively establish that this *Sūrah* was sent down at that particular time. Rather, it means that this *Sūrah* applies to the conduct of these two tribes.

Imām Bukhārī and Ibn Jarīr cite Ubayy ibn Ka'b's report: "We assumed that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) made the statement: 'If a man already possesses two valleys full of riches, he will still wish for a third one. Only the dust of the grave can put an end to man's greed,' was part of the Qur'ān until *Sūrah al-Takāthur* was revealed," This report is taken as proof of the Madīnan origin of this *Sūrah*, for Ubayy had embraced Islam during the Madīnan period. However, Ubayy's report does not clarify the basis on which the Companions regarded the Prophet's statement as part of the Qur'ān. It cannot be taken to mean that they considered it as a Qur'ānic verse. For, most of them recognized each and every word of the Qur'ān. They could not, therefore, mistake the Prophet's statement for a Qur'ānic verse. If they took the Prophet's statement as part of the Qur'ān it might mean that those Companions who had accepted Islam in Madīnah thought it to be a Madīnan *Sūrah* when they heard it for the first time from the Prophet (peace be upon him) and also that the Prophet's statement was derived from the same *Sūrah*.

Ibn Jarīr, Tirmidhī, Ibn al-Mundhir and some other *Hadīth* scholars have cited 'Alī's observation: "We had doubts about punishment in the grave until the revelation of *Sūrah al-Takāthur*." This too, is adduced in support of the Madīnan origin of the *Sūrah* in that mention was made of the punishment in the grave for the first time in Madīnah. However, this is not true. The following Makkan verses do speak of this particular mode of divine punishment: *al-An'ām* 6: 93; *al-Nahl* 16: 28; *al-Mu'minūn* 23: 99-100 and *al-Mu'min* 40: 45-46. 'Alī's observation proves, at most, that this *Sūrah* was sent down before the above-mentioned *Sūrahs*, which put Companions' minds at rest about this punishment.

Little wonder then that the majority of Qur'ān scholars label it as Makkan, a point reinforced further by its contents. It must, then, have been revealed in the early days of the Makkan period.

Subject Matter and Themes

It warns people against the terrible consequences of materialism and worldliness. Driven by a love of riches, worldly gains, pleasures and lust for power, man is engrossed until his last breath

AL-TAKĀTHUR (Acquisitiveness)

in acquisitiveness. Man remains preoccupied with cravings for ever-greater worldly gains and excelling others in this regard until his death. This makes him oblivious to higher truths. Man is further told that worldly bounties actually constitute a trial for him. He will be called to account for these on the Day of Judgement.